

UPDATE

Early Test for Diabetes in Pregnancy Found Reliable

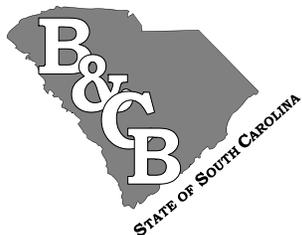
Screening women for gestational diabetes in the second trimester of pregnancy can accurately spot the condition, a new report suggests. Researchers say such early screening could lead to earlier treatment and potentially a lower risk of medical complications for both mother and baby. Currently, women are screened for the condition in the third trimester because physicians believe a later test is more accurate. However, a blood test taken in the 16th week of pregnancy identified 24 of the 25 women in the new study who had gestational diabetes.

Gestational diabetes is a temporary condition in which a pregnant woman fails to produce enough insulin to keep her blood glucose (sugar) in check. Elevated blood sugar, known as hyperglycemia, increases the risk of an extremely heavy baby that can cause newborn fractures and breathing problems in the infant, as well as a difficult delivery for the mother. The condition affects 2 percent to 7 percent of all pregnant women and can raise the risk of developing type 2 diabetes and possibly heart disease later in life. An early screening test could therefore identify women at risk and allow doctors to initiate treatment.

In this study, women whose 16th-week glucose levels exceeded 135 milligrams (mg) for each deciliter (dL) of blood, a widely recognized cutoff level, were found to have a 55 percent risk of developing gestational diabetes. Women with glucose levels of 110 mg/dL or lower had a less than 1 percent risk, while the risk for those whose levels fell between these two extremes was about 5 percent. "Glucose screening at 16 weeks of pregnancy is a useful alternative to third-trimester screening for gestational diabetes," the researchers conclude. They call for further research investigating the merits of early treatment for gestational diabetes on the mother and baby.

Gestational diabetes starts when your body is not able to make and use all the insulin it needs for pregnancy. Without enough insulin sugar builds up in the blood to high levels. This is called hyperglycemia. The American Diabetes Associations recommends that women 25 years and older, were overweight when they became pregnant, have a family history of diabetes and Hispanic, African American, Native American, Asian American, or a Pacific Islander should be screened for gestational diabetes.

SOURCE: Journal of Reproductive Medicine 2002;47.



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